

SHERMAN WILLIAM T.

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# Abraham Lincoln's Contemporaries

William T. Sherman

Excerpts from newspapers and other  
sources

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## UNION PORTRAITS

### III. WILLIAM T. SHERMAN

BY GAMALIEL BRADFORD

#### I

It is curious to turn from the study of Thomas to the study of Sherman. Thomas instinctively hides himself. To get at his soul you have to watch keenly, to pick up fine threads of self-revelation in a waste of conventional formality and follow their light tissue with the closest care. Sherman turns himself inside out even in an official document. He wore his coat unbuttoned, and his heart also; exposed its inmost lining to all the winds of heaven — and all the eyes of curious reporters, whom he detested for seeing and recording what was there and what was not. This perpetual exposure is almost as baffling as Thomas's concealment, though in another fashion. We like a soul to be open, and clean, and wind-blown. But I am not sure that we like to see it always thrashing on the clothes-line.

'Typically American' is a loose term and gets looser every day. But Ropes and many others have applied it to Sherman, and with singular justice. Few figures of the war have more marked American characteristics than he. Lincoln is often instanced. But Lincoln had strange depths, even yet unexplored, which do not seem American at all. Grant was too quiet.

Sherman was never quiet, physically or mentally. Like so many Americans who do things, he had not robust

health. In 1846, on his way to California, he gave up smoking. 'The reason was, it hurt my breast. . . . The habit shall never be resumed.' It was resumed, and given up again, and inveterate, as the hurt was. But no hurt made flag that indefatigable, unfaltering, resistless energy. 'Blessed with a vitality that only yields to absolute death,' he says of himself. Assuredly he was so blessed. One who did not love him observed, 'With a clear idea of what he wanted and an unyielding determination to have it, he made himself and everybody around him uncomfortable, till his demands were gratified.'

His character was written all over him. The tall, spare, wiry figure, the fine-featured, wrinkle-netted face, expressed the man. He had auburn hair, and one lock of it behind would stick straight out when he was eager or excited. I never think of Sherman without seeing that lock.

His manner was even more expressive than his features. He was always in movement, striding up and down, when he talked, if possible; if not, moving head, or hands, or feet. When Horace Porter first went to him from Grant, he found Sherman in his slippers, reading a newspaper, and all through the conversation the newspaper was frantically twisted and one foot was in and out of its slipper perpetually. The general's talk was hurried,



vigorous, incisive, punctuated with strange, sharp, and uncouth gestures. 'In giving his instructions and orders,' says one acute observer, 'he will take a person by the shoulder and push him off as he talks, follow him to the door all the time talking and urging him away. His quick, restless manner almost invariably results in the confusion of the person whom he is thus instructing, but Sherman himself never gets confused. At the same time he never gets composed.'

As he was American in look and manner, so he was eminently American in the movement of his life. He himself writes, 'It does seem that nature for some wise purpose . . . does ordain that man shall migrate, clear out from the place of his birth.' He migrated, at any rate, like a bird or the thought of a poet. Born in Ohio, in 1820, he passed apparently a tranquil boyhood. But with youth his adventures began. From West Point he went to Florida, from Florida to South Carolina. Then came California, then New York, then New Orleans, California again, New York again, St. Louis, and again New Orleans. Remember that in those days the journey from New York to San Francisco was like a journey round the world at present.

Nor was all this divagation merely military. Sherman was soldier only in part. At other times he was banker, farmer, lawyer, president of a railroad, president of a college. Only heroic self-restraint saved him from being an artist. 'I have great love for painting and find that sometimes I am so fascinated that it amounts to pain to lay down the brush, placing me in doubt whether I had better stop now before it swallows all attention, to the neglect of all my duties, discard it altogether, or keep on. What would you advise?' Here is the first and last time he ever mentions painting.

After this twenty years' Odyssey, just at the beginning of the war, he gets a spell at home with Penelope and the budding Telemachus, and observes, — with a sigh, — 'I must try and allay this feeling of change and venture that has made me a wanderer. If possible I will settle down — fast and positive.'

The war comes. He rides and rages through Bull Run, Shiloh, Vicksburg, Chattanooga, like a comet through Georgia and the Carolinas, to the highest war can give him, and to peace. But he never settles down — never.

## II

Some men whose feet are thus tirelessly wandering, tread a very narrow region in their minds, just as others' minds rove widely while their feet are still. With Sherman there was incessant movement of both mind and body. He had the busiest imagination in all these various careers, saw all possibilities of chance and accident and endeavored to provide for them, turned over a dozen courses of action before he hit the one that would answer his purpose best. At the beginning of the war others tried to accomplish full results with half measures, could not stretch prevision to the scope of effort necessary to avert the immense train of damage and disaster. Sherman saw and foresaw everything, and because he predicted the vastness of the struggle and demanded means adequate to meet it, those in authority, and the press men whose imagination was always hugely busy at short range, decried and almost displaced him as a sheer, unbalanced lunatic.

All through the war this acute imagination of military possibility and necessity marked him more than almost any one. Sometimes, doubtless, it led him to curious extremes, as in his advice to Sheridan in November, 1864:

'I am satisfied, and have been all the time, that the problem of the war consists in the awful fact that the present class of men who rule the South must be killed outright rather than in the conquest of territory . . . therefore I shall expect you on any and all occasions to make bloody results.'

An imagination so vivid and energetic has its dangers. One is the misrepresentation of fact, especially in the past. Perhaps Sherman was careless in this matter. His attitude is partly indicated in his remark to a newspaper man who had written a sketch of him: 'You make more than a dozen mistakes of facts, which I need not correct, as I don't desire my biography till I am dead.' This is all very well, but if a man does not correct his biography while living, his chance of doing it later is limited.

Sherman's Memoirs have been bitterly attacked on the score of inaccuracy. 'His story is often widely at variance with the Official Records, and with every one's recollection, except his own,' says Colonel Stone; and Professor Royce comments thus on the Californian portion: 'In fact, not only antecedent probability, but sound testimony, is against General Sherman's memory, a memory which, for the rest, was hardly meant by the Creator for purely historical purposes, genial and amusing though its productions may be.'

The general's remark in the preface to the revised edition of the Memoirs — revised chiefly by the printing of protests in an appendix — is most happily characteristic. I am, he says in substance, writing my own memoirs, not those of other people.

As to this question of accuracy, however, it is essential not to overlook the testimony of Grant, who declared that Sherman was thoroughly accurate, that he always kept a diary, and that the

Memoirs were founded on that diary in all matters of fact.

Another serious danger of a too active imagination is that it may go far outside the province that belongs to it. This was certainly the tendency of Sherman's. Not content with giving sleepless hours to devising all sorts of schemes for the military destruction of the enemy, he ranged far into politics, conceived and ceaselessly suggested measures financial and political which would aid in bringing about the military result. Many other generals had this habit, just as many politicians contrived to win victories in a back corner of an office; but few whirled out of their proper sphere with such break-neck velocity as Sherman. He was always delivering huge screeds of political comment, oral or written, to the North, to the South, to soldiers, to civilians, to officials, to laymen.

Hear one of his wildest outbursts on the general conduct of the war. 'To secure the safety of the navigation of the Mississippi River I would slay millions. On that point I am not only insane, but mad. . . . For every bullet shot at a steam-boat, I would shoot a thousand 30-pounder Parrotts into even helpless towns on Red, Ouachita, Yazoo, or wherever a boat can float or soldier march.' Do you wonder that some thought the general a little unreliable?

Hear him again on the deserts of the South. 'To the petulant and persistent secessionist, why, death is mercy, and the quicker he or she is disposed of, the better. Satan and the rebel saints of Heaven were allowed a continued existence in hell merely to swell their just punishment. To such as would rebel against a government so mild and just as ours was in peace, a punishment equal would not be unjust.'

It is this abstract and imaginative fury, constantly suggestive of the doc-



trinaire idealists of the French Revolution, which makes Sherman appear decidedly at a disadvantage in his correspondence with Hood concerning the treatment of Atlanta, and again in his correspondence with Hardee before Savannah.

As to details of policy there is the same fertility of suggestion, the same imperious decisiveness. Finance? Are you short of currency? Use cotton. Tie it up in neat weighed bales, and it will at least be better than your Confederate shinplasters. The draft? The draft? Certainly enforce the draft. 'Unless you enact a law denying all citizens between the ages of 18 and 45 who do not enlist and serve three years faithfully, all right of suffrage, or to hold office after the war is over, you will have trouble.' Niggers? Now what can you do with Niggers? They are not fit for soldiers, they are not fit for citizens, they are just fit for labor that white men cannot do. 'I would not if I could abolish or modify slavery,' he wrote in December, 1859.

The influence of all this varied thinking was doubled by a really demonic power of expression. Sherman's dispatches became letters, his letters pamphlets. Some accuse him of loquacity. This is absurd. His style is vigorous, pointed, energetic as his person. His abundance of words, great as it is, is lame and impotent to the hurry of his thought. This is the real significance of his ludicrous remark, 'I am not much of a talker'; and again, 'Excuse so long a letter, which is very unusual from me.' Not much of a talker! Oh, ye gods! The point really is that he talked vastly much, but he could have talked vastly more. On the whole, I am glad that he did not.

Those at whom he launched these verbal whirlwinds did not always appreciate them, or profit. Men thought he talked too freely, — 'more than was

proper,' was the opinion of the judicious Villard. At the beginning of the war Halleck gave his subordinate a kind and helpful caution, warning him that his use of his tongue was, to say the least, indiscreet. What is most charming in this connection is Sherman's way of receiving such good counsel. He knows the danger. He will do all he can to avoid it. 'We as soldiers best fulfill our parts by minding our own business, and I will try to do that,' 'I will try and hold my tongue and pen and give my undivided attention to the military duties devolving on me.'

He might as well have tried to dam his beloved Mississippi. Listen to the comment of one excellent observer on the general's conversational proclivities: 'He must talk, quick, sharp, and yet not harshly, all the time making his odd gestures, which, no less than the intonation of his voice, serve to emphasize his language. He cannot bear a clog upon his thoughts nor an interruption to his language. He admits of no opposition. He overrides everything. He never hesitates at interrupting any one, but cannot bear to be interrupted himself.'

The most striking instance of Sherman's talking and writing tendency to digress into politics was his agreement with Johnston upon terms of peace at the close of the war. In his zeal to carry out his ideas of the public good the Union commander certainly exceeded the ordinary limits of military negotiation. It is equally true that Stanton and Halleck were unnecessarily rough and discourteous in disapproving of his arrangements. Nevertheless, their ill-judged harshness did not justify Sherman's violent outburst to his own subordinate, Logan. 'If such be the welcome the East gives to the West, we can but let them make war and fight it out themselves.'

## III

What I have written so far must not be held to imply that Sherman was a dreamer, a mere visionary, who lived in the clouds. His whole career, and his immense accomplishment, would make such a suggestion absurd. Rich and eager as his imagination was, it was always subject to the closest bonds of logic and reasoning. It was this that made his conclusions not only abundant, but positive. 'My opinions are all very positive,' he writes, 'and there is no reason why you should not know them.' To him, at any rate, they appeared to be based on arguments which he had examined and found irrefragable.

It is curious that some who knew him well have denied that he was a reasoner. Professor Boyd declared that he leaped to results by intuition, that he could not give reasons, and that his letters contained, not reasons, but conclusions. This seems to me a misapprehension. It was not that he could not give reasons, but that he would not. He was a soldier, a man of action. He could not stop to make plain his mental processes to a bungler like you or me. Paper would not suffice to hold his conclusions. How then should he bother with explaining the long and devious paths by which he came to them? His own view of his logical activity is delightful. 'I am too fast, but there are principles of government as sure to result from war as in law, religion or any moral science. Some prefer to jump to the conclusion by reason. Others prefer to follow developments by the slower and surer road of experience.' Even more delightful is his adjustment of the whole matter to the somewhat academic level of Professor Boyd: 'Never give reasons for what you think or do until you must. Maybe, after a while, a better reason will pop into your head.'

This blending of iron logic with vivid imagination is most characteristic of Sherman always. His imagination made him wonderfully, charmingly tolerant, up to a certain point, of the views of others, and even, where he had not concluded positively, distrustful of his own. He begs to be checked, if inclined to exceed proper authority. With winning self-criticism he assures Grant that 'Rosecrans and Burnside and Sherman would be ashamed of petty quarrels if you were behind and near them.' And what an admirable piece of analysis is his comparison of himself with Grant and McClelland. McClelland, he says, sees clearly what is near, but very little beyond. 'My style is the reverse. I am somewhat blind to what occurs near me, but have a clear perception of things and events remote. Grant possesses the happy medium, and it is for this reason I admire him.'

But if Sherman was broad-minded and gently tolerant up to a certain point, beyond that he ceased to be so, and then his energetic logic made him refuse all compromise. He was, if I may use the phrase, fiercely reasonable. Just because he saw so far and saw so clearly, it seemed to him that there could be nothing worth considering beyond the limits of his vision. To serve under him, when you shared his views, or when you trusted him wholly, must have been a joy; but it was surely purgatory when you disliked him and he disliked you. If he was once convinced that you were in the wrong, nothing too savage could be done to set you intellectually right, for your own good. In other words, as an officer of the Inquisition he would have been unmatched in ingenuity and in severity.

Probably the most amusing as well as the most instructive of his intolerances was his animosity toward news-



paper men. No working general on either side enjoyed them or permitted them more freedom than policy absolutely required. But Sherman detested them. It has been shrewdly pointed out that he was too much like them to love them, and that as a war correspondent he could probably have earned a much larger salary than as a general. It has been suggested, also, that his professed hatred of publicity arose from a desire to supply his own, which he was royally able to do.

Be this as it may, the general is never more entertaining than when speaking his mind about the press. Sometimes he lashes it with sarcasm. 'We have picked up the barges, and will save some provisions, but none of the reporters "floated." They were so deeply laden with weighty matter that they must have sunk. In the language of our Dutch captain, "What a pity for religion is this war!" but in our affliction we can console ourselves with the pious reflection that there are plenty more left of the same sort.' Sometimes he lectures it paternally and endeavors to put these children of the evil one into the right way. 'Now I am again in authority over you and you must heed my advice. Freedom of speech and freedom of the press, precious relics of former history, must not be construed too largely. You must print nothing that prejudices government, or excites envy, hatred, and malice in a community. Persons in authority must not be abused.'

Is not every word of that delicious? And for misbehavior he would in all cases exact the severest penalty. 'Even in peace times I would make every publisher liable in money for the truth of everything he prints.' Oh, stern idealist,

Hereafter in a better world than this  
I shall desire more love and knowledge of you.

As newspapers represented free

speech, and as free speech is inseparably bound up with democracy, Sherman's mistrust of popular government grew all through the war. Personally he was the most democratic of men. Also, he was convinced that one political organization must prevail over the whole United States. But as to the final character of that organization he was somewhat doubtful. 'This country must be united by the silken bonds of a generous and kindly Union if possible, or by the harsh steel bands of a despotism otherwise. Of course, we all prefer the former.' Of course he did prefer it. Still, the editors sometimes tried his patience. Once, when it was over-tried, he wrote, 'The rapid popular change almost makes me monarchist, and raises the question whether the self-interest of one man is not a safer criterion than the wild opinions of ignorant men.'

The nice combination of restless fancy with rigorous logic which we have been analyzing probably reached its climax in Sherman's career with the celebrated and dramatic march from Atlanta to the seaboard. Hardly any other general, North or South, would have conceived anything so unusual. Sober critics, at the time and since, have condemned it from the purely military point of view. If justifiable, its justification must be found in those larger political arguments which delighted its contriver. It was forged almost as a dream in that eager and fertile workshop from which dreams came so thickly. But the point is that, conceived as a dream, it was worked out with minutely reasoned care, so that in the end success attended almost every step. It was no dream to lead a hundred thousand men two hundred miles through a hostile country and bring them out in perfect fighting trim and with a confidence in their commander which had grown at every step they took.

## IV

So we see that, for all his visions and all his theories, Sherman was an intensely practical man. Dreams to him were simply rich possibilities of fact. Except as they could be realized, he took no interest in them. And he devoted himself to realizing them with all the masterful energy of his nature. 'I must have facts, knocks, and must go on.'

Everybody recognizes that he studied his troops closely, kept careful count of just what men he had and what sort of men, and the same for the enemy. It is remarkable that, when so many generals allowed their imaginations to run away with them in overestimating the number opposed, Sherman more often calculated under than over.

Again, he was notable as a provider. He figured his needs carefully and made everything yield to them. Tracks must be kept clear, trains must be kept running, non-combatants must be disregarded, even though high authority appealed for them. No difficulties were recognized and no excuses would serve. To a hesitating quartermaster the curt answer was, 'If you don't have my army supplied, and keep it supplied, we'll eat your mules up, sir — eat your mules up.'

In other matters of organization Sherman had the same instinct for system and disliked what interfered with it. He objected, as Thomas did, to the intrusion even of philanthropy into the sphere of his command: 'The sanitary and Christian Commissions are enough to eradicate all traces of Christianity out of our minds.' Yet, while he exacted absolute subordination from others, he was ready and eager to obey the orders of his superiors, even though he might not approve of them.

There is difference of opinion as to

the minuteness with which he planned for possible contingencies. Schofield thinks that in this regard he was neglectful of detail. Possibly. But the activity of his imagination led him to consider and reconsider all the essentials of accident. And it was rare that either circumstances or the enemy confronted him with a situation which he had not already taken into account, — in most cases with adequate precaution.

The greatest test of a general's practical ability is his skill in handling men. Perhaps others surpassed Sherman in this, but, considering his temperament, his success was wonderful. His greatest lack was patience. When things did not suit him, he could be very disagreeable, as with Hooker. On the other hand, he had three admirable qualities, sympathy, simplicity, sincerity. He could understand a man's difficulties. He could step right down from his dignity and take hold of them. He had no hesitation in telling you what he thought, and you knew it was exactly what he did think.

With his equals and superiors this frankness is especially fine. How genuine, how free from offense because of that genuineness, and how helpful, are his letters of advice and caution to Grant, who was large enough to take them as they were meant and profit by them. Those addressed indirectly to Buell are no less creditable, though perhaps not received in quite the same spirit.

With his own subordinates Sherman's human qualities were even more effective. The soldiers delighted in 'the old man's' brusqueness and oddities. 'Uncle Billy' was a quaint figure such as simple minds love to mock at and tell tales of. It is alleged that strict discipline was not always observed in Sherman's armies. If so, it was because the commander cared nothing for parade troops. He was too busy with



what was essential to bother with what was not. But if discipline means instant readiness to go when and where ordered, Sherman's men were disciplined enough. They had confidence in their chief. Even when he seemed to be leading them out into the darkness, away from all support and all communication, they never hesitated to follow. He said everything would be right, and they knew it would. What is more, they loved him. In spite of his wrinkled face and his harsh speech and his uncouth ways, they loved him, because they knew that he was honest and fearless, and thought more about them than he did about himself.

## V

Through all this discussion, the reader will constantly have appreciated what I meant by calling Sherman typically American. Though by profession and habit a soldier, in his union of the theoretical and practical he was essentially the man of business who is to-day everywhere the most prominent and characteristic American figure. Let us see how thoroughly the business quality entered into the various aspects of Sherman's career.

To begin with, he was a vast and tireless worker. 'His industry was prodigious,' says Grant. 'He worked all the time, and with an enthusiasm, a patience, and a good humor that gave him great power with his army.' He was no shirk, no man to throw on to others anything that he could do himself. On the contrary, if others failed him, he would do double. 'They have not sent me a single officer from Washington, and so engrossed are they with Missouri that they don't do us justice. The more necessity for us to strain every nerve.'

Again, fighting, with him, was rather a business than a pleasure. His per-

sonal courage was, of course, beyond question. But some have questioned whether, as a consequence of his imaginative and sensitive temperament, he was not somewhat less clear-headed and capable under the pressure of combat than when planning a battle or a campaign. General Howard asserts that 'his intense suggestive faculties seemed often to be impaired by the actual conflict.' On the other hand, Cox and Schofield both testify that where others grew excited Sherman grew cool, and that in the presence of immediate danger he dropped theoretical discussion and settled all difficulties with peremptory sternness. 'On the battlefields where he commands Sherman's nervous manner is toned down. He grates his teeth and his lips are closed more firmly, giving an expression of greater determination to his countenance.'

In any case, although he calls being at the head of a strong column of troops, in the execution of some task that requires brain, the highest pleasure of war, yet it is evident that to him fighting was chiefly a means to an end; in other words, a matter of business, to be carried on calmly, carefully, and intelligently as such. 'Neither of us,' he says of Grant and himself, 'naturally was a combative man.' In the same spirit, though infinitely careful of his troops, he viewed slaughter with indifference when the necessities of business required it. 'Tell Morgan,' he said, 'that we will lose 4000 men before we take Vicksburg, and we may as well lose them here as anywhere.'

The same businesslike tone appears in Sherman's attitude toward ambition and glory. Like every man who does things, he wished posterity to speak well of him, to speak highly of him, and he would have been the last to deny it. But he was singularly free from the petty vanities of show and



adulation which disfigure the biography of so many generals. As he rather affected a shabby appearance, so he rather affected an avoidance of newspaper notoriety. 'I never see my name in print without a feeling of contamination, and I will undertake to forego half of my salary, if the newspapers will ignore my name.' Even as regards more substantial recognition he was somewhat reluctant, not from undue modesty, for no one ever better gauged his own achievements, but because he feared that sudden exaltation meant a sudden fall. Early in his career he expressed his wish to remain in the background, and when promotion came his first feeling was that he had not yet deserved it. Few men on the road to distinction have expressed themselves more sensibly than he does in his admirable letter of advice to Buell. 'To us, with an angry, embittered enemy in front and all around us, it looks childish, foolish, yea, criminal — for sensible men to be away off to the rear, sitting in security, torturing their brains and writing on reams of foolscap to fill a gap which the future historian will dispose of by a very short, and maybe, an unimportant chapter, or even paragraph. . . . Like in a race, the end is all that is remembered by the great world.'

It is in this purely business instinct, the combining of theory with practice for a business purpose, that we must seek the explanation of the most curious problem in Sherman's career, his harsh and barbarous treatment of the invaded enemy. No man was by nature less cruel than he. No general expresses himself in the earlier part of the war more decidedly against plundering and vandalism. He urges upon his subordinates consideration for non-combatants: 'War at best is barbarism, but to involve all — children, women, old and helpless — is more than can

be justified.' He deplores the lack of discipline which 'makes possible the excesses of the soldiers. 'I am free to admit that we all deserve to be killed unless we can produce a state of discipline when such disgraceful acts cannot be committed unpunished.' He is even almost ready to resign his position, he feels the disgrace so keenly. 'The amount of burning, stealing, and plundering done by our army makes me ashamed of it. I would quit the service if I could, because I feel we are drifting to the worst sort of vandalism.'

Then he has an army of his own, marches straight into the South, and leaves a trail behind which makes him not only execrated by his enemies, but typical in modern warfare for destruction and plunder. And all just as a sheer matter of business. The war must be ended, and the way to end it was not merely to defeat armies in the field but to bring desolation and misery to the humblest homes of the Confederacy. He may not have said 'War is hell,' but assuredly he acted it. He may not have burned Columbia, but he did write officially, 'I should not hesitate to burn Savannah, Charleston, and Wilmington, or either of them, if the garrisons were needed.' And he summed up the whole bare naked theory in one tremendous passage, as characteristic of the man as of the methods he employed: 'Of necessity in war the commander on the spot is the judge, and may take your house, your fields, your everything, and turn you all out, helpless, to starve. It may be wrong, but that don't alter the case. In war you can't help yourselves, and the only possible remedy is to stop war . . . Our duty is not to build up; it is rather to destroy both the rebel army and whatever of wealth or property it has founded its boasted strength upon.'

As an admirable concrete illustration of this thoroughly businesslike frame

of mind, take the following little touch. At the bottom of a page of the *Memoirs* we read the solemn injunction, 'There should be no neglect of the dead.' Turn the page and we find out why: 'because it has a bad effect on the living.'

In enlarging on this fiercely practical element in Sherman I have not meant to give the impression that he was a mere machine man, without nerves or emotions. Quite the contrary was the case. He was all nerves, at least on the surface; for I have a shrewd suspicion that, as with so many Americans, the dance of the muscles was a helpful outlet for inward restlessness. To every emotional stimulus he responded with the utmost vivacity. A fair day almost distracts him from the rush of battle, and in a formal report he writes, 'The scene was enchanting; too beautiful to be disturbed by the harsh clamor of war; but the Chattahoochee lay beyond and I had to reach it.' On the other hand, when the news of South Carolina's secession came to him in New Orleans, he burst into tears.

Also, he was irritable, as every one admits, had sharp outbursts of temper when things went wrong. This appeared in many little matters as well as in the great historical scene when he showed his bitter, if justifiable, wrath against Stanton by refusing to take his hand before the eyes of the country and the world. As with his other faults, Sherman was quick to recognize this one, illustrating Grant's excellent comment on him, 'Sherman is impetuous, faulty, but he sees his faults as well as any man.' Speaking once of his companion in arms, McPherson, the general said, 'He is as good an officer as I am, is younger, and has a better temper.'

Again, as Sherman was irritable, so he was susceptible of depression and discouragement. The term *melancholy*, so applicable to Lincoln, has no significance here. Sherman's downheart-

edness is far better expressed by the very American word for a very American thing, — *disgusted*. His low spirits had always a perfectly tangible cause, and a moment's change in external circumstances could remove them. But while they lasted, they were very low indeed, and his expressive organization made them widely manifest. Read Villard's account of the behavior which led to the widespread belief that the general was insane. His fear as to the future of the Union was so great that it clung to him day and night like an obsession. 'He lived at the Galt House, occupying rooms on the ground floor. He paced by the hour up and down the corridor leading to them, smoking and obviously absorbed in oppressive thoughts. He did this to such an extent that it was generally noticed and remarked upon by the guests and employees of the hotel. His strange ways led to gossip, and it was soon whispered about that he was suffering from mental depression.'

For the internal view of these moods take a passage from Sherman's own letters on a slightly different occasion. 'My feelings prompted me to forbear and the consequence is my family and friends are almost cold to me, and they feel and say that I have failed at the critical moment of my life. It may be I am but a chip on the whirling tide of time, destined to be cast on the shore as a worthless weed.'

Then would come the rebound, and natural vivacity and gayety would amply justify the remark of one who knew him well, that, 'Of a happy nature himself, he strove to make all around him happy.' For laughter as a leisurely ornament of life Sherman had too little time. The humorous wrinkles were crossed and crowded out by wrinkles of care and passionate endeavor. But he had in a high degree the American gift of shrewd, witty words that either tickle



or sting. How apt is his description of Beauregard, 'bursting with French despair.' How merry is his account of a lawsuit he would wish to have conducted. 'I would give one hundred dollars to be free to take Levy's case — put St. Ange on the stand and make him describe his drive to Judge Boyce's and back — he first described the journey as enough to kill any horse, but now that his horse is lame he insists it was a sweet ride and not enough to hurt a colt. There is plenty of fun in the case.' How apt and merry both is his recommendation of some Negro troops to McPherson. Mark Twain might have written it. 'There are about one hundred Negroes fit for service enrolled under the venerable George Washington, who, mounted on a sprained horse, with his hat plumed with the ostrich feather, his full belly girt with a stout belt, from which hangs a stout cleaver, and followed by his trusty orderly on foot, makes an army on your flank that ought to give you every assurance of safety from that exposed quarter.'

The nerves which were so susceptible to comedy were also responsive to the pathos of life. Very little acquaintance with Sherman is needed to show that his imagination made him quickly aware of the sufferings of others and his energy hastened to relieve them. This is evident at all stages of his career, whether he was visiting the bedside of a sick cadet in his Southern college, or interfering to protect some poor widow from the misery his abstract theories of destruction had brought upon her. 'The poor woman is distracted and cannot rest. She will soon be as prostrate as her dying daughter. Either the army must move or she.'

And though neither fantastic nor morbid, Sherman was as sensitive in his conscientiousness as in his sympathy. Where he thought he had done injustice, he would not rest till he had made it

right. However his eager fancy might lead him into misstatements, no man was more scrupulous about telling the truth as he knew it. Above all, he was rigidly insistent on financial honesty. In commercial as well as in military pursuits, he would tolerate no transaction which had the slightest taint. Even such a trivial matter as sending home insignificant souvenirs troubled him. 'I could collect plenty of trophies but have always refrained and think it best I should. Others do collect trophies and send home, but I prefer not to do it.'

Upon what foundation of religion this strict morality was based is a curious study. Considering his freedom of expression in other respects, there are singularly few religious references in Sherman's letters. If he was at all lacking in positive beliefs, such uncertainty was at any rate not of the rather abject type so exquisitely mocked by Voltaire in his story of the Swiss captain who withdrew into a thicket before battle and prayed, 'O my God, if there is a God, please save my soul, if I have a soul.' It is probable, however, from occasional allusions to the matter, that Sherman cherished some broad religious beliefs rather positively, but that his essential effort was to forward the cause of good in the world and to love his fellow men. In other words, here again his religion was that of millions of other honest, earnest, hard-working Americans: that is, a religion made up, in about equal parts, of reverence and indifference, and perhaps well expressed in the phrase of one of them, 'I am doing my work, let God do his.'

#### VI

To complete the picture it will be well to point out some defects, or shall we say limitations, of this vital, intricate, most fascinating character, though



these limitations are hard to seize and still harder to define.

To begin with, you feel a little excess of purpose in his life. Purpose is a splendid thing, a thoroughly American thing; it moves the world like the lever of Archimedes. But purpose for breakfast, luncheon, and dinner does grow wearisome. A day of mere quiet is good for every one. I do not believe Sherman ever had an hour. To live with him must have been like living with a bumble-bee.

Then I feel that Sherman had not depth quite in proportion to his ample breadth and variety. There were elements in life that he never touched. The most striking illustration of this is in his letters. I read his official correspondence and I was astonished at the freedom and ease with which the man poured forth his thoughts and feelings on matters that others were inclined to treat merely formally. I said to myself, what a treasure of self-revelation in things of the soul his personal letters will be. Well, when I turned to the personal letters, they added little or nothing to the official. To his brother and his wife he writes exactly as to a subordinate, or a department official, or an editor. He says all he has to say to everybody and anybody. It will be urged that only those portions of his private correspondence which bear on public interests have been published. But that is not the point. It is what he does write that counts, not what he does not. His letters to the girl he loved would make excellent weekly correspondence for a newspaper. Take a curious instance. He begins an affectionate letter to his daughter. Before he has written a page, he drifts into political discussion and concludes that he is writing to the mother, not to the daughter at all.

Another odd case of this living for publicity is Sherman's insertion in his

Memoirs of the letter referring to his son Willie's death. The paper in itself is touching. The father's affection for his son, as for all his family, is evidently strong and true. But the introduction of such a letter in such a way would have been utterly impossible for a nature like that of Thomas.

And since I have mentioned Thomas, let me refer to still another matter which will help to make plain the subtle point I am elucidating. To both Thomas and Lee, grateful fellow citizens made offer of a house purchased by subscription. Both Thomas and Lee refused, requesting that the money might be given to poor and suffering soldiers. A similar offer was suggested for Sherman. Though unwilling to take anything for himself, he was ready to accept it for his family, provided it was accompanied with bonds sufficient to pay the taxes. There was nothing in the least discreditable about this, nothing even indelicate. It may be that the nicety of Thomas was overstrained. But the difference of attitude illustrates exactly what I am attempting to analyze.

May we use the painter's phrase, and say that Sherman's character lacked atmosphere, lacked that something of depth and mystery which makes the indescribable, inexhaustible charm of Lincoln? Sherman is like one of our clear, blue January days, with a fresh north wind. It stimulates you. It inspires you. But crisp, vivid, intoxicating as it is, it seems to me that too prolonged enjoyment of such weather would dry my soul till the vague fragrance of immortality was all gone out of it.

Yet in his defects, as in his excellences, he was, we may repeat, a typical American. Perhaps I cannot better emphasize the absurdity of that word 'typical,' than by expressing the wish that there were many more Americans like him.

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